Suffering in service

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Preacher: Rev David Meredith

[0:00] Reading this evening at verse 19. 1 Peter 2 verse 19.

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering, because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit, if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?
But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God. And if you've read these words with any degree of understanding, you'll really come away with the impression that these are very revolutionary words.
So let's concentrate on this passage from verse 18 down to the end of the chapter. Now Peter here this evening is bringing us to a very unpopular topic and a very unpopular subject.
It is the subject of submission. Now Peter has been dealing with this, we saw last week or the week before, how we had to submit to government. And now this evening Peter is coming to us and he's saying, you've got to submit to two things.
[1:13] You've got to submit to those folks who employ you, and then you've got to submit to suffering. And then next week we'll notice at the beginning of chapter 3, how it says, wives in the same way be submissive to your husbands.

And I'm sure we look forward to that next study with some degree of prepudation and perhaps interest. So that's people's theme, the theme of submission. And that's got a very popular concept in the world today.
Because modern society has been reinforcing the idea of individualism. that you don't need to submit to anyone. You don't need to submit to the government.
You don't need to submit to your employer. That man is born free and that man has his own free agent. And as we see that that is clearly not the biblical lifestyle.
The way of God is very different to the way of modern society. And so this evening let's turn to this passage in the Bible. And let's turn to it without prejudice.
[2:12] Let's turn to it as if we had never seen it before. And let's turn to it as if we knew nothing about the subject. And let's realise what we go away with from this particular passage.

I want us to notice three things. First of all we notice here that the Bible calls us to submit to masters. Two things. First of all we notice the people involved.
What does he say? Slaves submit yourselves to your masters with all respect. Not only to those who are good and considerate. But also to those who are harsh.
Two groups of people are involved. We find in the first place slaves. Now contrary to popular opinion. There are not any slaves in Britain today.
Certainly not in the same level as these slaves here. You may think you're a bit of a slave at work. But I can assure you in the biblical sense of the term. There are no slaves in Britain today.
[3:11] But in the Roman Empire. Slavery was rampant. And 60 million slaves lived in the Roman Empire alone. And in a normal city. 50% of the population would in fact be slaves.

And in fact modern ancient history tells us. That in Rome. No Roman citizen worked. That all the work was done by slaves. A Roman citizen thought it degrading to work.
And so his slave would do absolutely everything. And slavery. Slaves weren't only the people who did the menial tasks. This word covers household servants.
And that word covered doctors. Teachers. Folks who were nursing. As well as folks who were cleaning. Scrubbing. And sort of butlers. And so the word slave there covered almost everyone who did any work in the New Testament era.
And so it was household servants. And so it's not easy to draw parallels between the slaves in verse 18. And you and me sitting here this evening.

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[4:18] But Peter here is writing to a very specific situation. He's talking to these folks in the church. And he's imagining a certain thing happening. He's saying you've got a slave.

And the slave is converted. The slave suddenly comes to know Jesus as his saviour. And what is he being taught in the church? He's been taught in the church that in Christ there is no bond or free. He's been taught from the teaching of Paul and the apostles. That there's a glorious liberty in the gospel. And there's a glorious freedom. That there's no longer any black or white bond or free male or female.
And he's been brought into this tremendous liberty that he hasn't even heard of or has conceived of before. But Peter's imagining a problem.
You've got this slave and he's been converted. And perhaps he's a Christian master. And there they meet in the church and they're equal. Perhaps the slave preaches in the church.
[5:20] Perhaps the slave prays in the church. And the master doesn't. And so spiritually the slave is further on than the master. Now Peter is worried that the slave might become a little bit cheeky.

A little bit disobedient. And perhaps even lacking in respect. And so to this situation Peter says, Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.
And so he's saying that although you may have deeper maturity, Although you may have deeper understanding, Still you have to submit to your employer. You have to submit to your master.
And by the way, that word master is a very strong word. It's the same word that we take the English word despot. A cruel, unwielding figure.
These masters had total control. You didn't just go up to these masters and say, Can I have a day off, sir? You just didn't do that because these masters owned the slave.
[6:24] Now I don't think we fully appreciate that. The fact that someone can actually own someone else. I am told that today in the Philippines, for example, You can actually buy people.

And that was the same situation here. These slaves were bought. Just as we have an automatic washing machine in our house or a dishwasher. These folks bought slaves.
And every leading family had a slave. That was just the way things were in that society. And so that's the first thing we see here that people describe. But then more for our interest, the attitude required.
What does he say? Slaves, submit to your masters. Now what's he saying? He's saying submit. Yeah, that's fine when they do good to us.
They feed us and pay us and they're nice to us. Yes, we'll submit. No, no. It says not only to those who are good and considerate, But also to those who are harsh.
[7:27] That is what the Bible says. What does it say? It says, if your master is crooked, If your master is harsh, If your master is someone who doesn't even deserve respect, Peter is still saying, Submit to that master.

Now to modernize and to even people who are not required to submit to the Bible, That is a very difficult thing to accept. And I know that even in terms of, And I know the condition that some folks even in this congregation work in.
And yet he's saying here, Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters. What's he saying though? The underlying principle is this. First of all he's saying that whatever work we do, Whatever you do, he says, I think Paul says this, Whether in word or deed, Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.
And we've got to realize, Why do we work? Do we work to pay off the mortgage? Do we work to pay off the car? Do we work to put food in our stomachs?
Fine, all these things are legitimate. But behind all these things, We work for God. Whatever we do, Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.
[8:56] Whatever our duty is in this world, Whether we work in the land, Whether we work in an office, Whether we work in a factory, A hospital, Whatever we do, We must do it unto the Lord, And to please him.

And so Christian behavior goes on and on and on. No matter who the master is, Even if it's a bad master, In fact, especially if it's a bad master, Our behavior must be circumspect.
Now today we are not slaves, We are in a different category to these people here. But the general principle remains, That we owe a certain honor and respect, To those who employs us.
So how can we apply that? Well, first of all, Be a good employee. Put in the best work we can. It's a form of witness. How often have we seen someone in the office, And they're a Christian.

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But yet they are the person, Who is doing the least work. Or they can take time off, And they can talk to people about all sorts of things.
[10:03] And they can talk about this, that and the other, But they're not doing their work. Everyone else in the office is working away, Except the Christian. And so at the end of the day, The Christian gets a bad name, Because he is not growing his weight.

It is a form of witness. And I believe that this passage is teaching us, That we have to bring Christ, Into industrial relations. Now I am not preaching politics here, Because that's not my job.
The Bible does not preach politics. The Bible preaches Christian behaviour, In specific situations. If a man, a slave here, Was under a contract.
And I believe that if we are under a contract, We must obey that contract. In the same way the employer, Is under a contract, He must obey it.
And so if we are under a contract, Whether it's for wages or conditions, We have signed it, We have agreed to it, And biblically speaking, Let our yeas be ye, And our nays be nay.
[11:13] If we have done that, We must adhere to it. But what we do need to bring, Is a Christian perspective. We must bring Christ, The saviour, Into our work situation.

And so I am not going to say, Anything about striking, Or not striking, That is not, In this instance, My job. Although perhaps everyone here, Is wanting to know about these things.
I don't believe, This verse sheds much light, On that particular issue. Because we are not slaves, They are in a different position to us. I am not going to be drawn into, That political sphere.
But, Our behaviour, Must be Christ-like. And we must remember that, In any given situation.
And remember what it says here. Not only to those, Who are good and considerate, But also to those, Who are harsh. He is saying this, To slaves, Remember.
[12:19] Do you not say that? He is saying this, To slaves, Folks in a specific, Relationship. And so that is the first thing, We see here. The Bible calls us, To submit to masters.

But then secondly, We notice here, That the Bible tells us, To submit to suffering. And that's what I want to spend, A bit of time on this evening. The Bible tells us, To submit to suffering.
Many of us have come, Even perhaps into the service, This evening. And we are conscious, Over the last week of suffering. We have suffered, Because of our faith. We have suffered, Because of what we have gone through.
We have suffered, From the hands of other people. And suffering can take many forms. Suffering can take the form, Of persecution. Folks are saying, That we have false motives, For doing things. And so they make us suffer. They call us names. They perhaps talk about us, Behind our back. And we suffer. But what is Peter saying here, About suffering?
[13:22] First of all he is saying, It demands grace. Look at verse 19. It says, For it is commendable, Now the Greek, Actually doesn't say commendable, It uses this expression, For this is grace.

If a man bears up, Under the pain of unjust suffering. It is stronger than commendable. It says, This is grace. Now before we go any further, In this passage this evening, We are dealing with, Extra ordinary statements.
Why? Because a Christian is called, To be an extraordinary person. We are called to be holy. And that word holy, Means different.
And that word holy, Means extraordinary. And the Bible says, To us very extraordinary things. It says, If someone slaps you in the cheek, You have to turn the other cheek.
It says that if someone, Persecutes you, To bless God for it. But, The Bible says, Very extraordinary things to us. And if anyone says, That a Christian is just an ordinary person, Do not believe him.
[14:38] So Peter says here in verse 19, For this is grace. This is the special enabling power of God, That helps us, In these very difficult situations.

And so friends, Take comfort from that. We are extraordinary people. And that doesn't mean, That we are extraordinary, In the sense that we are weird, In the sense that we are odd, In the sense that we, We are horrible people.
But it simply means, That we are not ordinary. We have gone the second mile, Because the Lord has helped us, We are extraordinary people. Now that word grace, Has very different shades of meaning.
First of all, It has the meaning of being pleasant, To look upon. And that's one of the points, He's bringing out in verse 19. For this is grace. He's saying, It's pleasant to look upon, If, If, You, Bear

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up, Under the pain of unjust suffering.
Because he is conscious of God. Now remember that the unbelieving world, Are looking at Christians. They are looking at how we behave, In a certain situation. And if we behave with grace, That means that that is pleasant, To look upon.
[15:58] Now let's think of our lifestyle. Let's think of our lifestyle. Are our lifestyles pleasant to look upon? Are our lifestyles full of grace? These folks who often persecute, And make us suffer, Do we feel animosity toward them, When perhaps it's not animosity, It is pity, And it's a concern for them.

Because persecution often comes, Because our lifestyles, Make them feel guilty. That's the crux of it.
Folks often make us suffer, Because they want to make us, Like them. It's called the tall poppy syndrome. If you've ever heard of the tall poppy syndrome, You imagine a large poppy, It's a tall flower.
And remember a wee boy, Going along a road, And he sees a tall poppy growing, And if you were a wee boy, Like I was a wee boy, What do you want to do? You want to cut it down. Because, Just because it's there, It's big, It's tall, So you want to cut it down.
And so it is with non-Christians, When they see Christians, They see within them, Christ's likeness. They see within them, God's grace. They see within them, The Lord's power.
[17:18] They see something, They don't have. And so they want to cut it down. They want to take you, Down to their level. And isn't that the crux, Of so much suffering, Because people feel uneasy, Threatened, Guilty, Even in our presence.

And as I shared of that word, Grace, We are pleasant to look upon. And if we are pleasant to look upon, That means that the people, Who are unconverted, And who are looking upon us, Feel dirty. They don't feel right. We become a threat to them. And so we can endure suffering. Why? Because grace, Has promoted this attitude.
We are motivated by God. And verse 19, Sums up the Christian spirit. Why is it commendable, To bear up under pain, Of unjust suffering? Why, why, why?
Because, He, That is the Christian, Is conscious, Of God. What is our main motivation in life?
[18:24] Is it to seek fame? Is it, To seek, Our own personal, Aggrandisement? Or is it because, We are conscious of God.

Are you conscious of God, In your life? And there are many, Men and women, And they agree, Before other people, Very holy, And very spiritual.
But yet, When these other people, Are gone away, And they're perhaps, Behind their own, Family door, They're a very different person, To the way they are, In the church, A very different person, To the way they are, In the community.
Why? Because they are living, And seeking, Up to men, Not conscious, Of God. So, Where are we this evening?
All of us are very conscious, Aren't we? Some of us are fashion conscious, Some of us are hair conscious, Some of us are image conscious, We want to present image, All the time.
[19:31] We want to present the image, Of perhaps being sophisticated, Perhaps being cool, Perhaps being suave, Perhaps being clever. And we are conscious, Of our image, But are we conscious, Of God?

Are we conscious, Of the one, Who has the all-seeing eye, And who sees us, All the time? And so, That's the Christian spirit, It says here, It is commendable, If a man bears up, Under the pain, Of unjust suffering, What price, Are you going to pay, This evening?
What price, Am I going to pay, To lose, The smile of God, On my life? And that's worth, More to me, And I'm sure more to you, Than anything else, In the whole world, The smile of God, On you, And my, My present lifestyle, And those of us, Who have lost, God's smile, Those of us, Who have cheated, Those of us, Who have gone against, God, We know, What it's like, Not to have his smile, But his frown, And we know, What it's like, To lose, That constant communion, With him, I wonder, This evening, Has God's smile, Changed in our lives?
Are we conscious, Is our behavior, Dictated, By the Lord's will? The Bible tells us, To submit to suffering, We've seen that, That demands, Grace, We can't do it, On our own, We must realize, That it takes, Guts, To get on, In this world, There was, A nurse, On TV, The other week, I think her name, Was Helen Sinclair, She was captured, In, Somewhere in, Africa, And she was, Brought kidnapped, She was made, A kidnapped victim, Remember, Listening to her, Being interviewed, In

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BBC two, And she spoke, About God's grace, In that situation, That to me, Is living, 20th century, Christianity, A wee lassie, Who'd spent, All her days, In Belfast, Suddenly, Being kidnapped, In the middle, Of an African jungle, And yet, Coming through, With a lovely, Smile on her face, That's grace, That's what God, Does in her life, And then, Christian suffering, Demands grace, But secondly, Christian suffering, Is part of our calling, You see that, In verse 21, It says, To this you were called, Because Christ, Suffered for you, Leaving you, An example, This brings out, The concept of calling, In the Christian faith, And I want to, Spend a wee bit of time, In that, It says, To this you were called, Now that's important, He's saying, You were called, As a slave, Sometimes to suffer, As a slave, And so often, We think that, When a man is, Brought into, Conversion, That he's been called, Into full time, Christian work, And that's not always true, In fact, The Bible, Gives advice, To new converts,

[22:56] And that new advice, Is to stay, In the position, You're in, If the Lord calls you, As a slave, Stay as a Christian slave, If the Lord calls you, As a Christian, Bank manager, Stay as a Christian, Bank manager, And so that's, Behind that word, Calling, To this, You were called, God called you, As you are, Where you are, To work for him, There, If it is, Of course, A legitimate office, Obviously, I still remember, The first, Few months, I was here, Saying, That it would be dubious, For a Christian, To be a bookmaker, And many people, Had this impression, Of a man, Making books, And they thought, There's nothing wrong, With that, Obviously, That sort of occupation, Of ones involving, Begging, It's not, Shall we say, Glorifying to God, And so the Lord, In converting us, Is calling us, Out of that, But if we're,

In a legitimate, Position, Then the Lord, Is saying, Stay, In that calling, And there is, As much opportunity, For Christians, Witnessing, In the realm, Of finance, In the realm, Of industry, And any, Any other, Field, Because I'm sure, From day to day, You come in contact, Perhaps, With far more, Unconverted people, Than I do, And if everyone, Here, Everyone who's, A Christian witness, And brought someone else, To our congregation, Next Lord's day, We would be doubled, In the space of one week, But the main point here is, That in our calling, Suffering is a very part, Of that calling, Why?

Because we're united to Christ, And what did they do to him? They strung him in a cross, And what will they do to us? They will try, To persecute us, You see, We are united to Christ, And we cannot have, All the good things, Without, Without, Without, Going through, All the things, Which are not, So pleasant, And so, The third area, Of submission here, Is, The Bible tells us, To submit, Like Christ, What does it say, In verse 21?

Because Christ, Suffered for you, Leaving you, An example, Now we cry out, It can't be done, Here's Peter saying, He's saying, Suffer, He's saying, It's commendable to suffer, Then we're saying, It can't be done, Nobody's ever done it before, Then Peter says, Look here, Listen to this, Because Christ suffered for you, Leaving you an example, That you should follow, In his steps, He endured unjust reproach, He endured much terror, And he was satisfied, To commit himself to God, Two things here again, First of all, The Bible tells us, To submit like Christ, Christ, First of all, As an example, Notice that word, That's used there, Leaving you an example, It's a lovely Greek word, Have you ever seen these, Our early boy, Ian's got one of these books, And it's a writing book, And at the top of the page, It shows you an example,

Of copper plate writing, And you just go to the child, And say, If you want to learn to write, Simply copy, The writing above, When I was at school, That's how I was, People attempted to teach me, To write like that, You copy the top line, And you work your way down, Well the Greek word, For that top line of writing, Is the same Greek word, That's used here, As an example, A pattern, In a children's writing book, We have to be, Imitators of Christ, A man called, Thomas Accompe, Wrote a book, Called the imitation of Christ, And isn't that, What we, Those of us who are Christians, Are called to do, Imitate Christ, If we are Christians, We must copy the pattern, And the pattern of Christ, Is a pattern of suffering, So we must copy that pattern also, And Peter describes, The Lord's suffering, Doesn't he in his, Old testament language, And two things stand out, We find, Initially, His innocence,

[27:18] He committed no sin, And no deceit, Was found in his mouth, That was the character of Jesus, He was innocent, He didn't deserve to suffer, But still he was punished, Unjustly, Clearly he is different to us, That's why he died for us, But I'm sure we can apply this verse, So often we blame, Sin on circumstances, Remember Adam, In the garden of Eden, He blamed sin, And circumstances, And this excuse, Has been repeated, Over and over again, It wasn't me, It was the

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wife, That did it, I wasn't going to do it, But the wife told me to do it, That's what Adam said, Eve took of the apple, She told me to do it, It was the woman you gave me, Poor women, They're so often getting the blame, And that's, We often blame our sin, On circumstances, If I was in a different job,

I wouldn't sin so much, If I had a different house, I wouldn't sin so much, If I was married to a different woman, I wouldn't sin so much, I am suffering, Because of my circumstances, He committed no sin, And no deceit was found in his mouth, He was sinless, Yet he suffered, The bottom line is, That there is no excuse, For sin, We sin, Not because we blame other things, But because so often, We want to, And that's the essence of sinfulness, Self-centredness, We want to, We want to do it, We want to do wrong, And so often, We even kid ourselves on, But at the end of the day, Sin is selfishness, And that's, That's the definition to me of sin, Self-centred life, Me, Me, Me, Don't care what the implications are, I will, Do what I want, And the bottom line is, That we are responsible, For our own sin, Not our lives, Not our houses, Not our jobs, Not our church, Us, And so, We notice his innocence, But then secondly, We notice, His silence, And that's the stress, In the word, In the word, He committed no sin, And no deceit, Was found in his mouth, When they hurled their insults, At him, He did not retaliate, When he suffered, He made no threats, Instead, He entrusted himself, To the one, Who judges, Justly, Now the Greek language, Puts the stress there, It's a present, What's called a present participle, It's a, Under sustained retaliation, Under a sustained hurling, Of insults, Again and again, And again, And again,
They insulted him, Again and again, And again, They reviled him, But again, And again, And again, He didn't even open his mouth, And what kept him going, What kept him going, This?
He entrusted himself, To him, To God the Father, Who judges, Justly, And I wonder, As we go through our suffering, And that suffering, Is of the same nature, As the sufferings of Jesus, In the sense, That it sustained, He of course, Suffered things, That we can never suffer, He suffered more, Than we can, But yet, The bottom line is, He opened, Not his mouth, And what kept him going, In the sovereignty of God, Look at chapter 4, Verse 19, So then, Those who suffer, According to God's will, Should commit themselves, To their faithful creator, And continue, To do good, This is not defeatism, It is not defeatism, To commit our souls, To our faithful creator, And many organizations, Are asking us, To place their trust, In them, And how much more amazing, And how much more glorious,
[31:35] It is, We place our trust, In God, And so, He was there, As an example, But then, Secondly, He was there, As a substitute, He himself, Bore our sins, In his body, In the tree, So that we might die, To sins, And live for righteousness, By his wounds, You have been healed, For you were like sheep, Going astray, But now, You have returned, To the shepherd, And overseer, Of your souls, And there are many of us, Here this evening, And we can say, These words, We were once, Like sheep, Going astray, But now, You have returned, To the shepherd, And overseer, Of your souls, And to me, These are the most amazing, Verses in the whole Bible, He became our substitute, And the emphasis, In the original, Is on, He himself, He's not an example, For us there, Because we cannot suffer, The way he suffered, He himself suffered,

So that we might die, To sins, And live for righteousness, In other words, We are enabled, To, To bear up, Under unjust suffering, Why?
Because he, Has given us the life, To live unto righteousness, For by his wounds, We have been healed, I wonder this evening, Those of us who were, Once like sheep, Going astray, But now we have turned, To the shepherd, And overseer of your souls, Sheep going astray, How does sheep going astray, Behave?
Well there's, We can imagine, The person who needs Christ, Has been the reckless person, The person, Really indulged, In the very depths, Of depravity, That's one form, Of sheep going astray, But there's the other, More subtle, And equally dangerous thing, The sheep going astray, Being the respectable, Church of Goa, Who for year, After year, After year, Hears the gospel, For year, After year, Says, I will not, I will not, Of this man, To rule over you, Both are equally, Sheep going, Astray, And so, I speak especially, To younger people, This evening, Are we looking, For an example, Look at verse 21 again, What's wrong, What's wrong, With the example, Of Christ, And I say to everyone, Who's young here, What's wrong with him, Why, Do we not follow him, And many of us, Are wandering in the dark, Many of us,
Are wandering, And we're wishing, That we had a pattern, To follow, And many of us, This evening, Are suffering, Unjustly, What does the Bible say, Bear up to it, Bear with it, And cast it all, In the

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hands, Of God, For many of us, That's difficult to accept, Of course, We're not to lie back, And be, Fatalists, Of course not, But if we're employing, Every biblical principle, That we can, Then at the end of the day, We have to bend, To benefit, From our suffering, And cast everything, In the hand, Of God, And you say, Man, It's difficult, And I say, It sure is, Those of you, Who perhaps, Are even beginning, Your Christian life, And you're saying, Boy,
[35:14] I'm looking ahead, And, Oh, It's difficult, And I'm saying, It sure is, But his grace, Is immense, His love, Is vast, And his strength, Will enable you, To do, All things, We bow, In thy presence, Again, Oh Lord, Thanking thee, For this, Scripture, This evening, Help us, To apply it, In our own, Situations, Help us, We pray, To, Endure, Unjust, Suffering, Because, We know, That there's no benefit, If we endure, Just suffering, Because we deserve it, But we ask, Lord, That we would, Put the difficult, Things, Into practice, We thank thee, For the scriptures, We thank thee, For our time, This evening,

And for the enjoyment, Of the word, And we pray, That in all things, That we would place, The saviour first, That Jesus, Would be our song, And that Emmanuel, Would all, Have all the glory, In his land, Our father, We are conscious, Of our need, To be saved, We are conscious, Of a burden, Of sin, Help us, To cast our life, Into the Lord, Whose grace, Is sufficient, Amen,

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